Context and culture For its users, instances of language are never abstracted, they always happen in specific situations.In a similar way, it is an oversimplification to equate culture with nationality, using terms such as 'Brazilian culture' and "Turkish culture'. Such labels overlook the cultural variation within nations of social class, ethnicity, age, education, and individual preference. In modern societies, cultural identity is often multivalent, an intersection of many different loyalties and influences of which nationality is only one. In addition, increased migration means that a growing number of people have links to two or more nations, although–precisely because a dominant factor in their lives is this dual or multiple identity–they cease to be typical representatives of either, maintaining in their own person the diversity of their origins. An opposite tendency in the contemporary world is towards larger homogenous groupings. Thus labels such as 'Western culture', 'Islamic culture', and 'South–East Asian culture' seem more viable than they once did. Perhaps there is even an emerging 'world culture'. There is evidence, for example, from very different languages and places, that service encounters increasingly follow a similar script. This is something along the lines of 'My name is x. How may I help you?' as a greeting, and 'Have a nice day' on parting. In an unpredictable world it would be foolish to forecast whether it is the forces for diversity or for homogeneity which will prove the stronger. In applied linguistics these complex influences and variations are factors which must be kept at the forefront of investigation. Whatever our definition of culture, or our views about its universality, there can be little doubt that a real danger in the many activities which involve cross–cultural communication is misunderstanding. Consequently, in a wide range of personal and professional contexts, practical decisions must be made about how to avoid it. Translation, culture, and context Nowhere is this more apparent than in translation, where at every step decisions must be taken about when to provide explanation and extra detail, and how far to depart from the original. Even in the translation of a relatively simple business letter for example, there will be valid reasons not to use a literal translation but to mould what is said in one language to the conventions of another. 'Respected Gentleman Smith' may be the word–for–word translation of the Russian 'Uvazhayemy Gospodin Smith', but 'Dear Mr Smith' is more appropriate in the context. The study of translation–now commonly referred to as translation studies–has a far longer history than applied linguistics. Theories and practices of translation have changed but at their heart is a recurring debate, going back to classical times, about the degree to which a translator should attempt to render exactly what is said, or intervene to make the new text flow more smoothly, or achieve a similar effect as the original. This is by no means a simple matter. Word–for–word translation is impossible if the aim is to make sense. This is clear even when translating the most straightforward utterances between closely related languages. Take, for example, the French 'Ca me plait.Translated word for word into English it is 'That me pleases'. At the very least, this demands reordering to "That pleases me' to become a possible English sentence.Decisions have to be made about whether to gloss emotive words such as 'martyrdom', which has quite different connotations from the Arabic 'shahaada', or simply to give up in difficult cases and import the original word, as in the case of 'jihad' and 'sharia', thus assuming in the reader a relevant background knowledge which they may not have.To demonstrate this, applied linguistics has drawn upon, and also developed, discourse analysis–the study of how stretches of language in context are perceived as meaningful and unified by their users.At a time when new technologies mix writing and visual effects in ways which may be altering

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fundamentally the nature and process of communication, there is a pressing need to integrate findings from these disparate areas.New technologies make the paralanguage of writing increasingly more significant, for whereas, in the past, resources were limited to handwriting, typing, or printing, the computer has brought powerful new tools for document design within many people's reach.Yet, curiously, considering this inextricable involvement in communication, paralanguage has not been extensively studied by applied linguists.In linguistics, however, language is very obviously abstracted from experience in order to be better understood as a system, enabling grammatical regularities to be seen more clearly, even perhaps providing an insight into the representation of language in the mind.The study of visual communication and Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) are growing areas in applied linguistics, and likely to be increasingly important in the future.Yet, as even a simple example will show, translation cannot be conducted at a purely linguistic level but must incorporate cultural and contextual factors too.In this chapter we consider how context, and in particular cultural context, can be analysed and understood, and in general terms how it is relevant to all the areas of applied linguistics.It is not the case, as some linguists have claimed, that the meaning of language in context is so messy and subjective that it is beyond the reach of systematic enquiry.Written words can be scribbled, printed, or painted, and their meaning can be amplified or altered by layout, accompanying pictures, and diagrams. Take, for example, the translation of the English pronoun 'you' into a language which has a distinction between an informal second-person pronoun and a formal one (tu versus vous in French for example).For applied linguistics, such analyses of language are relevant to understanding the experience of language in use, but they must be combined with another kind of analysis too.Collectively, such factors are known as context, and they are all relevant to whether a particular action or utterance is, to use Hymes' term, appropriate.Systematizing context: discourse analysis Systematic description of context is notoriously difficult.It threatens to introduce enormous amounts of new material, and categories which are inherently slippery and vague.Three areas of study which contribute to this field are paralanguage, pragmatics, and genre studies.A good deal is conveyed by tone of voice-whether we shout or whisper for example, and by the use of our bodies-whether we smile, wave our hands, touch people, make eye contact, and so on. Such communicative behaviour, used alongside language, is paralanguage.Convincing research suggests that paralinguistic messages can outweigh linguistic ones, especially in establishing and maintaining relationships.All of the following, for example, might be involved in interpreting a real encounter: tone of voice and facial expression; the relationship between speakers; their age, sex, and social status; the time and place; and the degree to which speakers do-or do not-share the same cultural background.For this reason, understanding of paralanguage is relevant in any professional activity involved with effective communication, or developing effective communication in others, such as media training, speech therapy, and language teaching.Pragmatics is the discipline which studies the knowledge and procedures which enable people to understand each other's words.Indeed, they beg the question of the relationship between language and culture, for translation, as conventionally defined, is between languages not cultures.Communicative competence, as observed at the end of Chapter 5, is also in its way an abstraction.Yet it is a different kind of abstraction from descriptions of the formal systems of grammar and sound, and it views language from a different

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perspective.It points the way towards the analysis of language in use, enabling us to take into account many relevant factors other than the words themselves.As applied linguistics necessarily engages with the use of language, they must be central to any analysis.Of necessity, translators and interpreters must make such judgements all the time.The difficulties of translating news stories between Arabic and English provide many examples.In the actual experience of language its four parameters are neither as discrete nor as static as the model is sometimes taken to suggest.Indeed, whether written, spoken, or a mixture of the two, language cannot be used for communication without paralanguage.In many cases translation decisions can be a major factor in cross-cultural understanding and international affairs.In the latter part of the chapter we focus, in particular, upon the practice of translation.These are reasons for caution, but not for retreat.51 We must use some facial expression when we speak or make some choice of script or font when we write.Its role in speech has been left to psychology, and in writing to typography and information design.Its main concern is not the literal meaning, but what speakers intend to do with their words and what it is which makes this intention clear.Grammatically, it is an interrogative English sentence; taken literally, it is a question about someone's health.These may seem to be linguistic rather than cultural matters.In every instance a decision must be made about which to choose, and it cannot be based upon linguistic equivalence alone.The importance of such decisions, playing as they do a role in each community's view of the other, cannot be underestimated.They belong to particular people and are used to realize those people's purposes.These other factors are many.Let us deal, briefly, with each of these in turn.When we speak we do not only communicate through words.Writing has paralanguage too.Consider, for example, a simple and familiar utterance such as 'How are you?'Yet, in most circumstances, a more appropriate rendering would be 'I like it'.The issue therefore is not whether one should depart from the original but how much

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